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A MESSAGE TO OUR COMMUNITY FROM CHURCHILL DOWNS

The Kentucky Derby has been run every year for the past 145 years. It is a great American tradition that has survived depressions, wars, pandemics and myriad changes in our country, large and small.

The first Derby was run just ten years after the end of the Civil War and the end of slavery in America. Over ninety years later, during the 1967 Derby, protestors took to the streets around Churchill Downs, demanding equality and change.

Today, more than fifty years after that, our fellow Kentuckians and fellow Americans are still asking to be heard; for all of us to understand the ongoing inequality that exists, and finally to adopt meaningful change.

We are not doing enough, quickly enough. That is true in our country, in our city and in our sport.

We know there are some who disagree with our decision to run the Kentucky Derby this year. We respect that point of view but made our decision in the belief that traditions can remind us of what binds us together as Americans, even as we seek to acknowledge and repair the terrible pain that rends us apart.

Our sport shares a disconcerting history that led to the exclusion of Black jockey participation through the years. The legacy of the Kentucky Derby begins with the incredible success of Black jockeys. We feel it is imperative to acknowledge the painful truths that led to their exclusion. Churchill Downs strongly believes in preserving and sharing the stories of the Black jockeys who are a critical part of this tradition. This is not a new commitment, but we continue to seek ways to share these stories and honor these athletes.

Our goal has always been that the Kentucky Derby and the way it is observed throughout the city should be inclusive of the entire Louisville community. However, we hear the calls to do more and we have challenged ourselves to do so. We hear the voices that tell us we have not successfully created an environment in which everyone feels welcome or included. That is not acceptable and we need to do more to ensure that our best intentions become a reality. We need to do more, now, to ensure that every member of our community is a part of our traditions. Churchill Downs is committed to engaging in the hard conversations in our city, our sport and within our own organization. We are committed to taking real, concrete action to address institutional roadblocks to progress and playing our part in advancing the changes America so desperately needs.

We recognize that people in our community and across our nation are hurting right now. The atmosphere of the Kentucky Derby will be different this year as we respond to those calls for change. This will be a Derby unlike any other. As it should be.

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